



## River Guide 4: Brewer Bridge to Rocky Ford

River Mile: 19.2 to 27.0

Stream Gradient: 9.9 feet/mile

This stretch of the Niobrara offers some more challenging rapids than the segments upstream. Rocky Ford Rapid (class III) is for experienced whitewater boaters and must not be attempted in open canoes, open kayaks or tubes. Refer to the Niobrara National Scenic River brochure and map to locate the sites below.

### Brewer Bridge to Conner Rapids



Brewer Bridge

**Brewer Bridge**, built in 1899, spans the river four miles south of Sparks, Nebraska. This landing is owned by the **Middle Niobrara Natural Resource District (NRD)**. Around the corner on river left is **Graham's Camp**; just beyond is a fast riffle with an open slot on the left. Ahead on river left is **Sharp's Camp**. One-half mile downstream on river right the cold, clear waters of Big Cedar Creek

enter the Niobrara. Just below, Little Cedar Falls spills into the river. At the end of Sharp's Eastern Campground an "S" rapid (Class I) provides a thrill -- the swift chute below is a favorite swimming place. **Conner's Camp** is 0.6 miles downstream. Around the bend is **Conner Rapids** (Class I) -- a broad, underwater rock shelf with a couple of slots.

### Fritz's Island and Fritz's Narrows



Right channel – Fritz's Island

About 0.9 miles downstream on river left is **Stan's Landing & Fritz's Island Campground**. Just beyond the river flows on either side of a large island called **Fritz's Island**, named after *Fritz Brandenburg*, a colorful homesteader who once lived on the island for a time. Most boaters stay left of this island. On river right, shallow waters cover bedrock incised by long runnels that lead to an abrupt drop over a two-foot ledge (class II). Use **caution** if you run this rapid (better water depth if over 800 cfs) as rocks are present underwater at the edge; and the hole below is very deep (15 feet) with a powerful current. The remainder of the right channel around the island is slow water. On quiet days you may see a beaver

working, a snapping turtle sunning itself on a log, wood ducks swimming, or a great blue heron intent on spearing a fish.

Downstream is **Fritz's Narrows or The Chute** (Class I), a shallow rock shelf on the right with a deep sluice cutting the middle. This rapid, like any water feature, changes greatly with varying water levels. Late summer exposes the rock shelf, forcing canoers into the main channel with a bit more whitewater fun.



Fritz Brandenburg

## County Line Bridge to Rocky Ford Rapids



County Line Bridge



Below Sunny Brook Camp

Coming into view next is the **County Line Bridge** (privately-owned, no access). Along the following stretch the river widens and slows a bit. On breezy days battling an east wind can become tiring. 1.5 miles below County Line Bridge is **Sunny Brook Camp**.

The next section below Sunny Brook Camp (1.8 miles) is very picturesque. The main channel narrows and passes to the right of a small island, and then picks up speed and creates small choppy waves beneath shaded birch and basswood trees. The river turns right and enters a one-sided canyon with many beautiful waterfalls. There are many submerged rocks on either side of the main channel. These rock gardens provide fun maneuvering for kayakers and more skilled canoeists. Ahead on river left is **Rocky Ford Camp**.

Take out at the landing and portage around **Rocky Ford Rapids** (Class III), known by some as the Rock Dam. The Bruce Mill was located here in the 1890's and processed locally grown wheat into flour.

**Warning: do not attempt to run this rapid in an open canoe, open recreational kayak, or on a tube. Only skilled boaters should float this rapid. (Most outfitters prohibit their customers from running this rapid in their rental boats.)** People have nearly drowned in this rapid and boats are easily wrapped around a boulder. The fine-grained, gray texture of the bedrock and boulders of this rapid is an orthoquartzite of the **Rosebud Formation**. The portage trail works its way around the rapids on the left side. Please do not disturb campers here, as it is a private campground.



**Experts only!** A whitewater kayaker challenges Rocky Ford Rapids (Class III)